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# What I Have Learned

BY JOHN EHRLICHMAN

**W**HEN I HEARD THE NIXON TAPES, as my attorneys and I prepared for the cover-up trial, it became crystal clear that Richard Nixon had been involved in the cover-up within a week of the Watergate burglary. And everything and everyone Nixon and John Dean touched during the following 10 months was tainted with the cover-up conspiracy, including me.

I was involved in transmitting "hush money" to the Watergate burglars. In April 1973, I knew many facts about that burglary and the subsequent cover-up because I had conducted a two-week investigation at Nixon's request. I turned over my findings to the President; I should have gone to the U.S. Attorney with them. For over six months I had known that John Dean had information about the burglary, just as I knew Egil Krogh, David Young, Howard Hunt and Gordon Liddy had been involved in a California burglary while investigating Daniel Ellsberg. My legal obligation was to inform the authorities of those crimes. My failure to do so was an obstruction of justice.

In retrospect, I should have pleaded guilty to the charges against me, quietly gone to jail and moved along. As I underwent that long and sensational Watergate cover-up trial through the fall and winter of 1974, it was hard on my family, I know. But I could not

bring myself to utter the word "guilty," principally because of my vanity and pride.

I now realize that the trial was far more destructive for those I love, and for me, than an admission of guilt would have been.

I did what I did, and now—with nothing at risk—I can confront what happened and see it more clearly.

I regret deeply the harm that the Watergate episode—and especially my part in it—has done the country and the many people I care about. I realize that the Presidency went adrift in the trough of the waves in 1973 and wallowed there for about seven years as Presidents Nixon, Ford and Carter feebly dealt with Watergate's aftermath. Much of our present economic malaise has a proximate relationship to the failure of the Presidency to cope with its precedents, I believe.

At times I think that, if I'd been wiser, I might have deflected the course of history by persuading or forcing Richard Nixon to come clean early in the episode. I'll never know for certain.

But I do know that I should have realized and admitted my own guilt much earlier. Whatever the effect on history, I could have spared those I love much hardship.

For nearly 10 years (1959-69), I literally had a secondhand relationship with Richard Nixon—through Bob